Attracting Talent: A Lesson In Battling Perception

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In 2011, 50 percent of engineering students participating in a Booz & Company survey said they regarded manufacturing as an attractive career option. Meanwhile, 73 percent of brand owners taking part in a qualitative Manufacturing Excellence Share Group panel developed by the Alliance for Innovation & Operational Excellence (AIOE) said the most difficult skill to find in today's production workforce is the ability to solve problems.

This disconnect between perception and reality has made it challenging for food manufacturers to place young professionals in engaging, stable positions that require strong mechatronics skills and problem-solving capabilities, as well as a background in math and science. But why does this disconnect exist? Part of it is cultural. Since the 1970s, generations of parents have urged their children to pursue four-year college degrees. High schools are evaluated on the number of students they send to college — regardless of whether they become gainfully employed thereafter. Additionally, jobs in the manufacturing sector have been labeled unskilled and unstable after decades of shipping labor overseas and increasing automation.

While it is important for the industry to recognize and learn from the events that have led manufacturers to this predicament, it is even more critical to prioritize a solution. Despite the common preconceived notion that increasingly automated

operations are eliminating opportunities in the manufacturing sector, the widespread adoption of advanced production technologies is actually creating opportunities — and demand — for more skilled professionals.

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